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ABSTRACT

For many years, educators from kindergarten to twelfth grade have approached the teaching of vocabulary, spelling, grammar, punctuation, and so forth as isolated skills, unconnected with the everyday use of reading, speaking, and writing. Such practices are now viewed with less favor, as researchers and educators approach reading and writing as processes, to be dealt with as a whole. To capitalize on this trend, teachers need to recognize that children come to the classroom knowing something about language use, and that their prior knowledge must be built up and used to help them comprehend and use language experiences. The classroom must also be a literate environment, with plenty of diverse material for children to read, and children must be allowed and encouraged to visit school and public libraries and to browse widely. Additionally, classrooms need not be quiet places for learning to take place because children can learn much about language by discussing their experiences with one another. Teachers must understand that the processes of reading, speaking, and listening have a number of skills in common, such as pre-writing/thinking, drafting, and revising, and that all are valuable to children. The integration of such language arts skills can empower students and build their confidence, and thus improve children and society as a whole. (JC)

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# WHOLE LANGUAGE
# NOT THE SUM OF ITS PARTS

CATSKILL WHOLE LANGUAGE CONFERENCE
AUGUST 1987

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One cannot be involved in language arts instruction and not have a developed guilt complex. I have been in this work for thirty years, and thought I wrote rather well. Then along came writing process, and I learned that I had to pass through a number of stages as a writer. In addition, I needed to share what I had written with others either through a writing group or a peer conference.

I have always considered myself a good reader and one who has read widely. Then the professional literature informed me that it really takes two to read a book.

I came to this conference with a history of experiences in language arts only to find if you are involved with whole language you need to be able to sing in addition to a number of other things.

On a more serious note I want to thank you for the invitation to address this conference at one of its general sessions, and I want to begin this afternoon by asking you a few questions.

How many teach spelling and/or vocabulary development?

How many teach subject/verb agreement, capitalization, punctuation?

How many teach reading, writing, listening/speaking?

How many teach thinking skills?

How many teach literature?

Elementary questions and probably not new to many of you sitting in front of me whether you are first time attendees or in the class of "old" timers, but these questions and many more left unspoken for the moment are those which we must review as we think of Whole Language--Not the Sum of Its Parts.

Because for too long those of us involved in language instruction have used a piecemeal approach--one skill here--one skill there--15 minutes for spelling--15 vocabulary words for the week, commas in a series, setting, plot, character development, reading in three groups, if we're lucky, main idea on Monday with hopes of being at cause and effect by Friday or the following Monday at the latest.

Not only has this bits and pieces approach not worked, many of us continue it right up through the grades. Such an approach--attention to a multiplicity of skills in isolation--has not worked, and we have some research which suggests that it is detrimental because it takes away valuable time from more important things.

I think, however--and this conference is an indication--that times are changing. For the last ten years at least, we have begun to see and hear of some different ways of thinking about what we are doing in the English/Language Arts, and I believe the work in writing process and the emphasis on reading as process has begun a quiet revolution. You cannot be involved in these processes unless the language arts are integrated.

However, this begun revolution will come to nothing if we do not grasp the moment and begin to look at language arts and the way it is taught in a much different way.

Essential to language arts instruction is the fact that language must be used and practiced in all its forms. Most children come to us using language and knowing something.

Young children know how to use language for a purpose and how to differentiate its use according to the audience. Anyone who doubts this needs only observe how children approach their mother with a request and then their father with the same request, and those of use who have reached the grandparenting stage see this same phenomena repeated when grandchildren ask Mommy and then as Grandmom.

We know that children have experiences which we need to capitalize on and if they do not have wide experiences or some which we deem necessary, then we as professionals need to work to expand their experiences. You can't tap prior knowledge if kids don't have it, so one of our main responsibilities is to see to it that children have ways to build that prior knowledge base.

The classroom must be a literate environment--rich in books, trade books and books authored by students and teachers. In addition, children need access to a library--school and community. They must be encouraged to browse among the books, touch them, look at them, and feel free not to complete something started if it does not meet their needs.

Children do not always have to read at or above grade level. In fact, how many of you spend the majority of your time reading at your grade level? I delight in the idea that I can at times read far below mine and enjoy every minute of the experience. Encourage reading, no matter at what level!

The idea that a quiet classroom is a classroom where learning takes place may not necessarily be true. In fact, I believe that a classroom devoid of language interaction may be disastrous to our children if one of our goals is to develop students who are active language users, because large numbers of our children come from homes where language use is not a central activity.

Latch key children, single parent children, children glued to the television may not be receiving the experiences associated with language growth--opportunities to sit together to share the day's experiences, question, discuss these experiences--may not be possible for many segments of our population.

I want to insist that much of your time spent in the classroom has to be in oral language--not only as speakers which as teachers we're all so good at but better still as listeners and ones who instigate opportunities for students to share with each other, us, and whenever possible across grade levels.

Some of you are now saying but Charlie--I have to teach writing skills, reading skills, spelling and all the rest after all the State is breathing down my neck with the threat of the DRP, the 5th grade writing test, the PCT, RCT--to say nothing of

the English Regents; and if there aren't state mandated tests, then there are those mandated by the district.

I know this is a dilemma, and I want to offer a suggestion or two along those lines in a minute. Now I want to suggest some of the ways that I think the different segments of language arts can be brought together.

Process

The recent discussion of and the implementation of the writing process in our classrooms today provides the groundwork for developing and integrated language arts program for several reasons. Let's review in a general way the writing process as detailed and accepted in much of the professional discussion today.

We seem to agree that the writer goes through several stages in order to produce a finished product--pre-writing (getting ready), drafting (getting it down), revising (changing and rearranging), editing (polishing for another's eye), and publishing (sharing). We know that a writer does not move through this process in a linear fashion but rather may be involved in the process in a recursive manner which permits movement back and forth between and among stages. Such action depends upon need, self-generated or required by an outside demand. We have learned that individual authors do not move through the various stages in the same way and do not have the same needs or style; however, we have come to accept the idea

that the stages are important as the writer moves toward an end product.

I now want to discuss these stages and show the similarities and crossovers to reading, speaking and listening.

Prewriting (Getting Ready)

The writer prepares for the task and can do so in a number of ways. These include but are not limited to: reading, note taking, questioning, interviewing, free-writing, reworking previous material, brainstorming, mapping and webbing, discussing, researching, thinking, dreaming, drawing. The writer may begin to make some initial determinations about purpose, form, and audience, but at this point there may not be major determinants of what is yet to follow. Several researchers suggest that the mere act of writing will determine for the writer what is to be said.

Whatever is included in this prewriting stage, we all agree that the majority of writers will do some of the above in order to move along in the process. For you, the teacher, the opportunity to integrate rests in the fact that the reader, listener, and speaker also pass through a similar "getting ready" stage and such knowledge can be valuable information as you look at ways to enhance instruction.

The reader gets ready to read and one should find ways to focus on this aspect of reading in order to produce more able readers. As readers do we not capitalize on prior knowledge?

Don't we raise questions about the forthcoming text? Preview materials? Make predictions? Begin to consider the purpose of the text and its meaning to us?

As too doesn't the listener/speaker go through a getting ready stage. Even with the most casual of conversations, the listener/speaker draws upon prior knowledge/familiarity of the context, manner of speech, mentally raises questions to be answered or predicts directions in which the communication will go.

In more formal listening/speaking situations the parallel of this stage are more apparent. The listener commences with prior knowledge and questions to be answered. The listener begins to integrate what is heard with what is known or predicted would come, making some determination of the speaker's purpose and intent.

For a more formal speaking situation, the speaker may well go through exactly the same type of preparation as does the author.

Drafting and Revising (Getting It Down and Changing It)

These two stages are best discussed together for the purpose of showing similarities among the various language arts segments in process. The writer begins to write sustained discourse, letting the words flow unimpeded by a need for correctness as does the reader whose eyes begin to move quickly across the page. The notion of purpose, form, audience begins to emerge, and for

the writer the product begins to take shape in its roughest form. At this stage, language is explored, words chosen, sentences formed. Meaning starts to emerge. No different for the reader, listener, speaker.

The listener tries to take in as much of the language as possible--connecting one thought to the next and mentally trying to link what is being said with what is known and what may be expected. Those preparing a formal speech may pass through the same process as the writer and even those who speak formally in an extemporaneous manner in all likelihood pass through similar steps.

In order to bring the piece to completion, the writer in most cases will revise what has been written during the drafting stage. Here the writer may eliminate, rearrange, elaborate, change what has been written. New words may be chosen, sentences reordered, or ideas joined and expanded as the piece takes on purpose, form, and consideration is given to the audience.

Is such a stage available to the reader, the listener? I believe it is. The reader certainly does not physically reorder the text, but mentally doesn't the reader revise? Predictions may be altered, new questions formulated. Sections of the text may be reread, paragraphs or sentences mentally eliminated as the reader attempts to find meaning in the written words.

The listener may be engaged in the same process, reformulating what has been heard and making connection to prior knowledge or questions yet to be answered.

Editing (Polishing It For Another's Eye)

At this stage the writer imposes the conventions of language on his or her product. Correct spelling, punctuation, capitalization, acceptable usage are brought to bear on the written text. The speaker differs in the necessity of imposing these conventions as the speech is prepared or produced. . The speaker has as aids intonation, body language, audience reaction (enabling perhaps on-the spot revision), and the pause. The listener may not necessarily impose editing but is certainly assisted by the speaker's use of those listed above. Likewise the reader can more easily obtain meaning from the text through these conventions and may in fact impose mentally some of his own on the text.

Publishing (Sharing)

The final stage of the process is publishing - making what has been relatively private, public. This stage does not necessarily have to be elaborate or formal and can range from pieces on the bulletin board to published books, but the idea is the sharing of what has been written with an audience - the act of communication.

Many of us in the profession have only now come to realize that this act is also necessary to ensure the comprehensibility of text, and it has been stated that it takes two to read a book. Obviously the speaker is engaged in this final stage more often

than not, but the case for similarities on the part of the listener are a little more difficult to discern. Perhaps that is because we do not often require the listener to share in much the same way that we are beginning to require of the reader. Now I cannot go through each of my other suggested ways for integrating but let me just touch on each briefly.

Content

We can integrated through content.

For content I can use a piece of literature and center all my language skills development around it, and I can do this at every grade level.

It doesn't make any difference if students are reading The Jolly Postman, Can I Keep Him, The Little Red Hen, Henry Huggins, Old Yellow, Stopping by the Woods, To Kill a Mockingbird, Song of Myself or Macbeth or if each student is reading a different text. I can connect all aspects of language arts to that text, and all of our activities will have it as a focus.

For content I can mean theme and we have heard about themes in a number of workshops this week. I can take the theme of change and adapt it for any grade level.

Our listening, speaking, reading and writing spelling, vocabulary can be connected to and intertwined with theme and I believe we can expand to make our approach interdisciplinary.

For content I could focus on topic which I think is more restricted than theme. So I can have dwelling places, holidays, elections, and any number of others generated by you or your students around which I can organize my language arts program.

Skills

I believe we can integrate our program through skills if we begin to look at skills not in isolation and in a discrete manner. I am convinced that many use the drill--skill--workbook--grammar exercise approach not through ignorance but as a management tool.

Suppose we look at a couple of skills that we might be interested in developing in our students.

Develop the topic with adequate and appropriate details. I know that I am interested in having writers develop this skill but isn't there a connection to what I am doing in reading? What I should be doing in the areas of listening and speaking? Can I not carry it even beyond the language arts? Isn't the science lesson, the social studies investigation, the geometry proof dependent upon the same skill?

Another skill may be to develop the students' ability to solve problems or make decisions based on an interpretation of information. Isn't this the basis of what we are talking about as far as a process approach is concerned? Isn't the writing process and reading process a moving through a series of problems? Posing the problem, finding a solution, and moving

forward. Isn't problem solving the basis of learning and a primary concern of living? Skills can and do bring together the language arts if not the whole curriculum.

Well you have been very patient as I have tried in perhaps a too elementary way to suggest ways to bring an integration to our language arts program, and you are still wondering so is the end result greater than the parts that I have talked about? I believe there is much to be gained, and let me cover just some aspects of what those gains may be.

I believe we can have a more interesting and valuable experience through these approaches, not only for the teacher but the students as well. I believe whole language can result in wholeness of community. One of the powers of the writing group can be a close knit group which understands and accepts the strengths and weakness of the members. If a diverging society ever needed ways to bring it closer together, it needs them now.

I believe the approaches we have heard about during this conference empower students; and if we begin in kindergarten and continue through 12th grade giving students power with their language, we will no longer need to worry about the National Assessment of Educational Progress and its dire predictions of what our students cannot do.

I believe the approaches we have heard about during this conference empower the teacher as well, but they also demand a literate and a model professional. And so I ask you--How many books have you read this summer? If I stopped right now and

asked each of you to turn to your neighbor and talk about a book you are presently reading or have just finished reading, would you be struck dumb?

When did you write last--not only in your journal--but when did you bring a piece to completion ready for sharing? As the teacher model, you are a lover of language--you read--you write. You have to work hard to mold your students in a similar image. You not only know the books of your profession but those of your children as well. How many have read Atwell, Hansen, Graves, Caulkins, Murray and the list goes on? You are the authority in the classroom, so you must be in touch with the most recent discussions in your field.

How many of you have had to have the services of a surgeon in your lifetime? Would you think of going to such a person if that person had not done any professional reading for the past five years or better still since graduating?

And now just a quick word about tests. We are a test happy society--not only in school but in life as well. I do not know what the answer is other than we must keep constantly infront of us the idea that tests are artificial. No test is real. Let me suggest just one step we could take (and I've already begun it at my level) to address the testing problem.

As a teacher begin to list each test that a student is required to take in your school--the type of test--when taken--how long it took. Let's begin to compile that list and show a composite profile of the tested child in our schools. With such

such a profile I believe we are strong enough to campaign for other ways of evaluating and other measures of accountability. I might also want to know the number of tests required by the local school districts--as compared to those required by the state. We might get some interesting results here. We can not make a strong case against testing if we do not have data, and I think we could begin to build our case by starting with what I have just suggested.

You need to take a look at the content of these tests and if there is any alignment with your program. I contend that if you have a strong, integrated language arts program your students will score well on the tests. You need to provide them with such a program and guarantee that they have a familiarity with the test format which makes them comfortable with the test. However, to spend long periods of time (I have seen a semester spent getting students ready for the Regents.) drilling students on the same types of discrete skills often found on these tests is, I believe, morally unconscionable.

As people involved in the language arts, you are the most important people in the school--forget what you hear about science, math, foreign languages--because without facility with language the student will not be successful in school and perhaps in life--that is a heavy burden of responsibility for you to carry, but I am certain after my experience here this week that you are capable of fulfilling that responsibility for the betterment of each child and our society as a whole.